"But we settled it less than 200 years ago--haven't had much time for mutation. Guthrie was settled in the First Dispersal. They lost touch with Earth for almost eight hundred years before we found them again. Guthries are tough!"

"Muscles are to march on," Craven interrupted. "Brains are the foundation of modern weaponry--my TI told me so."

"If you believe that you'll believe anything."

"Don't fight, children," Nadia said.

Hillis turned soulful brown eyes on her. "Don't worry, ma'am, if he hits me with his brains I won't feel a thing."

They seemed prepared to carry on the good humored feud all the way to the planet, but Clement bored into the conversation.

"Dr. Palevi--were you briefed on this assignment?"

"Just what you heard, Clement. Why?"

"Well, it all seemes pretty vague to me. I can understand the security--" his cool glance dismissed the two men on either side of Nadia as if they didn't exist, "but you and Beth and I--we're not detectives--we don't know if an artifact exists or the natives have some kind of cultural hang up. Beth and I were working on the Ettorian schema for vectoring Mortai spirochetes, which could be very important--"

Nadia stopped listening before Clement stopped talking. She, at least, was aware that this assignment was a treat--the Captain's understanding of a treat being the opportunity to risk one's neck on a hostile planet. And she knew why Clement wasn't finding it so delightful. Before the advent of Dray T'serek, Clement had been claiming Sundersun's attention in and out of the lab. Sunderson, like the other women aboard, had been smitten. Between her silent adoration of Dray and Clement's jealous sulking, Nadia expected to have her hands full.

Not that she was blind to T'serek's charms. In addition to the brooding good looks, he was charged with vitality, he didn't put himself forward, and he did his job. But he moved her not at all. Somehow he lacked the peculiar mixture of strength and need that struck responsive chords in her. On the contrary, as she mollified Clement and kept up her conversation with Craven and Hillis, Nadia was more aware of Mr. Spock. There was nothing out of the ordinary in his quiet absorbtion in his computer--but it was too ordinary. T'serek was sitting as straight as a ramrod in the pilot's chair, every move shining--metaphorically--with spit and polish, and Spock wasn't noticing. She watched them for half an hour, and they sat within six inches of each other without one social exchange. That might have been characteristic of Spock four years ago, but not now.

Nadia had been very aware of Spock when she first signed aboard. She came on staff right after the change in command and she heard all the scuttlebutt about the Vulcan's loyalty to Pike and his iceberg personality. She had observed him with the detatchment of her training and discovered two things. The first was that Spock shared her joy in the solution of scientific problems--that possession and employment of talent which is the most enduring happiness. Her second discovery was basec on nothing dramatic--two men talking shop over a chess game or sharing coffee after a long shift, but it had eased her awareness of the Vulcan. Pressed, she would have said that Spock worked well with his new Captain. Now, for no reason, she was aware of him again.

She was so deep in thought that it startled her when T'serek reported the Enterprise moving out of orbit, preparing for her warp-speed jump to V'ei'drei. She followed the dwindling image of the starship on the monitor until it disappeared and T'serek replaced it with a view of the planet.

With no satellite, no rings, and less surface water than Earth, Ixmahx offered little as a tourist attraction. It did have considerable vulcanism and they passed over one cloud-covered area on the dark side that glowed neon orange from underneath.

"Where are we going, Mr. Spock? Do they have a planetary capitol?"

Spock turned from his computer. "The culture resembles a military theocracy, and there is a center of administrative and religious activity on the smaller continent, Dr. Palevi. However, I am not sure where we will land. The Planetary Speaker will be contacting us with instructions and coordinates."

Well, she wasn't included in the no socializing rule evidently. She thought about the package the Federation provided newly joined members. Of all the gifts it was not the wealth of trade, or the computer technology that most justified the old charge of imperialism, but the coordinate grid, an invisible, intangible net that brought the newcomer into line with the shared Federation culture. Based on the clumsy latitude and longitude of old Earth, the concept that every square foot of surface on or in the crust of a planet was known, named and numbered changed the way people thought abou their world. It stressed the similarity and multiplicity of inhabited planets. Instead of "the world" a planet became "a world." The shift in thinking generally put an end to geographic exploration since the unknown territories were known and coded. Quite incidentally, the process of establishing the grid delineated the fault lines caused by tectonic action, measured the magma in volcanic vents and probed the water tables.

We're like people who come to dinner and start rearranging the furniture, Nadia thought. We arrive with information that dictates their future. Don't build there--an earthquake's coming. Nice islands, but they're going to sink. Pretty mountain but it's planning to blow up. She could accept the necessity of it and appreciate its efficiency without really liking it any more than she liked being so thoroughly known herself. She was more than the total of age, I.Q., blood chemistry, and the unshed eggs in her belly. In the same way the planet below them was more than the sum of its coordinates. On occasion the Federation netted a fish and ignored the sea. We don't know this world, she thought in unaccustomed revulsion toward mensuration and progress. We don't know it at all.

It was a welcome distraction when T'serek announced a message from the planet coming in. The world view dissolved into an alien face.

"Welcome to Ixmahx, gentlebeings. I am Planetary Speaker Goren." A display at T'serek's right, out of sight of the vid pickup verified the identity of voice and face, listed the highest civilian